

Identity and Its Vicissitudes: Hegel's 'Logic of Essence' as a Theory of Ideology Slavoj Žižek

The Principle of the Insufficient Ground

Love lets us view imperfections as tolerable, if not adorable. *But it's a choice.* We can bristle at quirks, or we can cherish them. A friend who married a hot-shot lawyer remembers, 'On the first date, I learned that he could ride out rough hours and stiff client demands. On the second, I learned that what he couldn't ride was a bicycle. *That's* when I decided to give him a chance.'

The lesson of the so-called 'endearing foibles' referred to in this quote from *Reader's Digest* is that a choice is an act which *retroactively grounds its own reasons*. Between the causal chain of reasons provided by knowledge (S_2 , in Lacanian mathemes) and the act of choice (that is, the decision that by way of its unconditional character concludes the chain, S_1), there is always a gap, a leap that cannot be accounted for by the preceding chain.¹ Let us recall what is perhaps the most sublime moment in melodramas: a plotter or a well-meaning friend tries to convince the hero to leave his sexual partner by way of enumerating the latter's weak points; yet, unknowingly, he thereby provides reasons for continued loyalty, that is, his very counter-arguments function as arguments for commitment ('*for that very reason she needs me even more*').² This gap between reasons and their effect is the very foundation of what we call transference, the transferential relationship, epitomized by love. Even our sense of common decency finds it repulsive to enumerate the reasons we love somebody: the moment I can say 'I love this person for the following reasons . . .', it is clear beyond any doubt that this is not love properly speaking.³ In the case of true love, apropos of some feature which is in itself negative, that is, which offers itself as reason against love, we say 'For this very reason I love this person even more!' *Le trait unaire*, the unitary feature which triggers love, is always an *index of an imperfection*.

This circle within which we are determined by reasons, but only by those which, retroactively, we recognize as such, is what Hegel has in mind when he talks about the 'positing of presuppositions'. The same retroactive logic is at work in Kant's philosophy, in the guise of what, in the Anglo-Saxon literature on Kant, is usually referred to as the 'Incorporation Thesis'.⁴ There is always an element of autonomous 'spontaneity' which pertains to the subject, making him irreducible to a link in the causal chain. True, one can conceive of the subject as submitted to the chain of causes which determine his or her conduct in accordance with 'pathological' interests; and, indeed, therein consists the wager of utilitarianism (since the subject's conduct is wholly determined by seeking the maximum of pleasure and the minimum of pain, it would be possible to govern the subject, to predict his or her steps, by controlling the external conditions which influence his or her decisions). But what eludes utilitarianism is precisely the element of 'spontaneity' (in the sense of German Idealism) – the very opposite of the everyday meaning of 'spontaneity', that is, surrendering oneself to the immediacy of emotional impulses, and so on. According to German Idealism, when we act 'spontaneously' in the everyday meaning of the word, we are not free from, but prisoners of, our immediate nature, determined by the causal link which chains us to the external world. True spontaneity, on the contrary, is characterized by the moment of reflexivity; reasons ultimately count only in so far as I 'incorporate' them, 'accept them as mine' – in other words, the determination of the subject by the other is always the subject's self-determination. A decision is thus simultaneously dependent on, and independent of, its conditions: it 'independently' posits its own dependence. In this precise sense, the subject in German Idealism is always the subject of self-consciousness: any immediate reference to my nature ('What can I do, I was made like this!') is false; my relationship to the impulses in me is always a mediated one, that is, my impulses determine me only in so far as I recognize them, which is why I am fully responsible for them.⁵

Another way to exemplify this logic of 'positing the presuppositions' is the spontaneous ideological narrativization of our experience and activity: whatever we do, we always situate it in a larger symbolic context charged with conferring meaning upon our acts. A Serbian fighting the Muslim Albanians and Bosnians in today's ex-Yugoslavia conceives of their fight as the last act in the centuries-old defence of Christian Europe against Turkish penetration; the Bolsheviks conceived of the October Revolution as the continuation and successful conclusion of all previous radical popular uprisings from Spartacus in ancient Rome to the Jacobins in the French Revolution (this narrativization is tacitly assumed even by some critics of Bolshevism who, for example, speak of the 'Stalinist Thermidor'); the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia or Sendero Luminoso in Peru conceive of their movement as a return to the old glory of an ancient empire (the Inca empire in Peru, the old Khmer kingdom in

Cambodia); and so on. The Hegelian point to be made is that such narratives are always retroactive reconstructions for which we are in some way responsible; they are never simple given facts. We can never refer to them as a found condition, context or presupposition of our activity precisely because as presuppositions such narratives are always-already 'posited' by us. Tradition is tradition in so far as we constitute it as such.

These paradoxes enable us to specify the nature of 'self-consciousness' in German Idealism. In his critical remarks on Hegel, Lacan as a rule equates self-consciousness with self-transparency, dismissing it as the most blatant case of a philosophical illusion bent on denying the subject's constitutive decentring. However, 'self-consciousness' in German Idealism has nothing whatsoever to do with any kind of transparent self-identity of the subject; it is rather another name for what Lacan himself has in mind when he points out how every desire is by definition the 'desire of a desire'. The subject never simply finds in itself a multitude of desires; he or she always entertains towards them a reflected relationship. By way of actual desiring, the subject implicitly answers the question, 'which of your desires do you desire (have you chosen)?'⁶ As we have already seen apropos of Kant, self-consciousness is positively founded upon the non-transparency of the subject to itself: the Kantian transcendental apperception (that is, the self-consciousness of pure I) is possible only in so far as I am unattainable to myself in my noumenal dimension, qua the 'Thing which thinks'.⁷

There is, of course, a point at which this circular 'positing of the presuppositions' reaches a deadlock – the key to which is provided by the Lacanian logic of the non-all [*pas-tout*].⁸ Although 'nothing is presupposed that was not previously posited'; that is, although, for every *particular* presupposition, it can be demonstrated that it is 'posited' (that is to say that it is not 'natural' but *naturalized*), it would be wrong to draw the seemingly obvious *universal* conclusion that '*everything* presupposed is posited'. The presupposed X which is 'nothing in particular', that is, totally substanceless, is, nevertheless, resistant to retroactive 'positing'; it is what Lacan calls the *real*, the unattainable, elusive *je ne sais quoi*. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler demonstrates how the difference between sex and gender – the difference between a biological fact and a cultural-symbolic construction (which, a decade ago, was widely used by feminists in order to show that 'anatomy is not destiny', that is, that 'woman' as a cultural product is not determined by her biological status) can never be unambiguously fixed or presupposed as a positive fact. It is always-already 'posited': how we draw the line separating 'culture' from 'nature' is always determined by a specific cultural context. This cultural overdetermination of the dividing line between gender and sex should not, however, push us into accepting the Foucauldian notion of sex as the effect of 'sexuality' (the heterogeneous texture of discursive practices), for what gets lost is, thereby, precisely the deadlock of the real.⁹ Here we see the

thin, but crucial, line that separates Lacan from 'deconstruction': by granting the opposition between nature and culture as always-already culturally overdetermined, that is, that no particular element can be isolated as 'pure nature', does not mean that 'everything is culture'. 'Nature' qua Real remains the unfathomable X that resists cultural 'gentrification'. Or, to put it another way: the Lacanian Real is the gap which separates the Particular from the Universal, the gap that prevents us from completing the gesture of universalization, blocking our jump from the premiss (that every particular element is P), to the conclusion (that all elements are P).

Consequently there is no logic of Prohibition involved in the notion of the Real qua the impossible-nonsymbolizable. In Lacan, the Real is not surreptitiously consecrated, envisioned as the domain of the inviolable. When Lacan defines the 'rock of castration' as real, this in no way implies that castration is excepted from the discursive field as a kind of untouchable sacrifice. Every demarcation between the Symbolic and the Real, every exclusion of the Real qua the prohibited-inviolable, is a symbolic act *par excellence*. Such an inversion of impossibility into prohibition-exclusion *occults the inherent deadlock of the Real*. In other words, Lacan's strategy is to prevent any tabooing of the Real; one can 'touch the real' only by applying oneself to its symbolization, up to the very failure of this endeavour. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the only proofs that there are Things beyond phenomena are paralogisms – inconsistencies in which reason gets entangled the moment it extends the application of categories beyond the limits of experience. In exactly the same way, 'le réel' – the real of *jouissance* – 'ne saurait s'inscrire que d'une impasse de la formalisation' in Lacan can be discerned only by way of the deadlocks of its formalization.¹⁰ In short, *the status of the Real is thoroughly non-substantial*. It is a product of failed attempts to integrate it into the Symbolic.

The impasse, then, of 'presupposing' (that is, of enumerating the presuppositions – the chain of external causes/conditions – of some posited entity) is the reverse of these 'troubles with the non-all'. An entity can easily be reduced to the totality of its presuppositions. What is missing from the series of presuppositions, however, is simply the performative act of formal conversion which retroactively posits these presuppositions and makes them into what they are: that is, into the presuppositions of . . . (such as the above-mentioned act which retroactively 'posits' its reasons). This is the 'dotting of the i', the tautological gesture of the Master-Signifier that constitutes the entity in question as One. Here we see the asymmetry between positing and presupposing: *the positing of presuppositions chances upon its limit in the 'feminine' non-all; what eludes it is the real; whereas the enumeration of the presuppositions of the posited content is made into a closed series by means of the 'masculine' performative*.

Hegel endeavours to resolve this impasse of positing the presuppositions

(‘positing reflection’) and of the presuppositions of every positing activity (‘external reflection’) by way of determining reflection. This logic of the three modalities of reflection (positing, external, determining reflection)¹¹ renders the matrix of the entire logic of essence, that is, of the triads which follow it: identity, difference, contradiction; essence/form, form/matter, content/form; formal, real, complete ground; and so on.¹² The aim of the ensuing brief examination of Hegel’s logic of essence is thus double: to articulate the successive, and ever more concrete, forms of ‘determining reflection’ (the Hegelian counterpart of what Kant calls ‘transcendental synthesis’) and, simultaneously, to discern in them the same pattern of an elementary ideological operation.

Identity, Difference, Contradiction

When dealing with the theme ‘Hegel and identity’, one should never forget that identity emerges only in the logic of essence, as a ‘determination-of-reflection’: what Hegel calls ‘identity’ is not a simple self-equality of any notional determination (red is red, winter is winter . . .); it is the identity of an essence which ‘stays the same’ beyond the ever-changing flow of appearances. But how are we to determine this identity? If we try to seize the thing as it is ‘in itself’, irrespective of its relation to other things, its specific identity eludes us and we cannot say anything about it; the thing coincides with all other things. Rather, we must say that *identity hinges upon what makes a difference*. But the moment we grasp that the ‘identity’ of an entity consists of the cluster of its differential features, we pass from identity to difference. The social identity of a person X, for example, is composed of the cluster of its social mandates which are all by definition differential: a person is ‘father’ only in relation to ‘mother’ and ‘son’; in another relation, he is himself ‘son’, and so on. Here is the crucial passage from Hegel’s *Logic* in which he brings about the passage from difference to contradiction apropos of the symbolic determination ‘father’:

Father is the other of son, and son the other of father, and each only *is* as this other of the other; and at the same time, the one determination only is, in relation to the other . . . The father also has an existence of his own apart from the son-relationship; but then he is not father but simply man . . . Opposites, therefore, contain contradiction in so far as they are, in the same respect, negatively related to one another or *sublate each other* and are *indifferent* to one another.¹³

The inattentive reader may easily miss the key accent of this passage, the feature which belies the standard notion of the Hegelian contradiction. ‘Contradiction’ does *not* take place between ‘father’ and ‘son’ (here, we have a

case of simple opposition between two co-dependent terms); but neither does it turn on the fact that in one relation (to my son) I am 'father' and in another (to my own father) I am myself 'son', that is, I am 'simultaneously father and son'. If this were all there were to the Hegelian contradiction, Hegel would effectively be guilty of logical confusion, since it is clear that I cannot be both in the same respect. The last phrase in the quoted passage from Hegel's *Logic* locates the contradiction clearly *inside 'father' himself*: 'contradiction' designates the antagonistic relationship between what I am 'for the others' – my symbolic determination – and what I am 'in myself', abstractedly, from my relations with others. It is the contradiction between the void of the subject's pure 'being-for-himself' and the signifying feature which represents him for the others; in Lacanian terms: between S and S₁. More precisely, 'contradiction' means that it is my very alienation in the symbolic mandate, in S₁, which retroactively makes S (the void that eludes the hold of the mandate) out of my brute reality. I am not only 'father', not only this particular determination; but beyond these symbolic mandates, I am nothing but the void that eludes them. As such, I am their own retroactive product.¹⁴ It is the very symbolic representation in the differential network which evacuates my 'pathological' content; that is, which makes out of S, the substantial fullness of the 'pathological' subject, the barred \bar{S} , the void of pure self-relating.

What I am 'for the others' is condensed in the signifier which then represents me for other signifiers (for the 'son' I am 'father', and so on). Outside of my relations to the others I am nothing. I am only the cluster of these relations (or as Marx would have said: 'the human essence is the entirety of social relations'), but this very 'nothing' is the nothing of pure self-relating: I am only what I am for the others, yet simultaneously I am the one who self-determines myself, that is, I am the one who determines which network of relations to others will determine me. In other words, I am determined by the network of (symbolic) relations precisely and only in so far as I, qua void of self-relating, self-determine myself this way.

We encounter here again spontaneity qua self-determination: in my very relating to the other, I relate myself to myself, since I determine the concrete form of my relating to the other. Or, to put it in the terms of Lacan's scheme of discourse:¹⁵

$$\begin{array}{c} S_1 \text{ ——— } S_2 \\ \bar{S} \end{array}$$

We must be careful not to miss the logic of this passing of opposition into contradiction: it has nothing to do with coincidence or co-dependence of the opposites, with one pole passing into its opposite, and so forth. Let us take the case of man and woman: one can endlessly vary the motif of their co-dependence (each is only as the other of the other, its being is mediated by the being of its opposite, and so on), but as long as we continue to set this

opposition against the background of some neutral universality (the human genus with its two species, male and female), we are far from contradiction. In male-chauvinist terms, we arrive at contradiction only when 'man' appears as the immediate embodiment of the universal-human dimension, and 'woman' as 'truncated man'. Here the relationship of the two poles ceases to be symmetrical, since man stands for the genus itself, whereas woman stands for specific difference as such. (Or, to put it in the language of structural linguistics: we enter contradiction proper when one of the terms of the opposition starts to function as 'marked', and the other as 'non-marked').

Consequently, we only pass from opposition to contradiction through the logic of what Hegel called 'oppositional determination': when the universal, common ground, of the two opposites 'encounters itself' in its oppositional determination, that is, in one of the terms of the opposition. Let us recall Marx's *Capital*, in which the supreme case of 'oppositional determination' is capital itself. The multitude of capital (invested in particular companies, that is, productive units) necessarily contains 'finance capital', the immediate embodiment of capital in general as opposed to other particular capitals. 'Contradiction' designates, therefore, the relationship between capital in general and the species of capital that embody capital in general (finance capital). A more obvious example appears in the Introduction to *Grundrisse*; here, production as the structuring principle of the whole of production, distribution, exchange and consumption 'encounters itself' in its oppositional determination; the contradiction is thus one between production, as the encompassing totality of the four moments, and production as one of these four moments.¹⁶

In this precise sense, contradiction is also the contradiction between the position of enunciation and the enunciated content. It occurs when the enunciator himself, by way of the illocutionary force of his speech, accomplishes what, at the level of locution, is the object of his denunciation. A text-book case from political life: when a political agent criticizes rival parties for considering only their narrow party interests, he thereby offers his own party as a neutral force working for the benefit of the whole nation. Consequently, he does what he charges the other with, that is, he promotes, in the strongest way possible, the interest of his own party; the dividing line that structures his speech runs between his own party and all the rest. What is at work here is again the logic of 'oppositional determination': the alleged universality beyond petty party interests encounters itself in a particular party – *that* is 'contradiction'.

At the end of the credits of *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin revises the standard disclaimer concerning the relationship between diegetic reality and 'true' reality ('any resemblance is purely coincidental') to read: 'Any resemblance between the dictator Hynkel and the Jewish barber is purely coincidental.' *The Great Dictator* is ultimately a film about this coincidental *identity*: Hynkel-Hitler, this 'all-pervasive Voice, is the 'oppositional determination', the shadowy double, of the poor Jewish barber. Suffice to recall the scene in the

ghetto where loudspeakers transmit the ferocious anti-Semitic speech by Hynkel, while the barber runs down the street, as if persecuted by the multiplied echoes of his own voice, as if running away from his own shadow. Therein lies a deeper insight than might at first seem: the Jewish barber in *The Great Dictator* is not depicted primarily as a Jew, but rather as the epitome of 'a little man who wants to live his modest, peaceful everyday life outside of political turmoil'; whereas Nazism is precisely the enraged reverse of this 'little man', erupting when its customary world is thrown off the rails. In the ideological universe of the film, the same paradoxical equation is articulated in another implicit identity of opposites: Austria = Germany. Which country in the film plays the role of the victim and at the same time the idyllic counterpart of 'Tomania'? It is Germany, which embodies at the same time an 'Austerlic'-Austria, the small wine-growing country of happy innocent people living together like a large family. In short, it is the land of 'fascism with a human face'.¹⁷ The fact that the same music (the Prelude to Wagner's *Lohengrin*) accompanies both the barber's final speech and Hynkel's famous playing with the globe-balloon acquires thereby an unexpected ominous dimension: at the end, the barber's words about the need for love and peace correspond perfectly to what Hitler-Hynkel himself would say in his sentimental *petit bourgeois* mood.

Form/Essence, Form/Matter, Form/Content

As we start losing ground in an argument, our last recourse is usually to insist that 'despite what has been said, things are essentially what we think them to be'. This is precisely what Hegel has in mind when he speaks of the essence in its immediacy: essence designates here the immediate inwardness, the 'essence of things', that persists irrespective of the external form. Cases of such an attitude, best exemplified by the stupidity of the proverb 'a leopard cannot change his spots', abound in politics. Suffice it to recall the usual right-wing treatment of ex-Communists in the East: irrespective of what they actually do, their democratic 'form' should in no way deceive us, it is mere form; 'essentially' they remain the same old totalitarians, and so on.¹⁸ A recent example of such a logic of 'inner essence' that stuck to its point notwithstanding the changes of the external form, was the judgement of the distrustful on Gorbachov in 1985: nothing will change, Gorbachov is even more dangerous than ordinary hard-line Communists, since he provides the totalitarian system with a seductive 'open', 'democratic' front, whose ultimate aim is to strengthen the system, not to change it radically. The Hegelian point to be made here is that this statement is probably true: in all likelihood, Gorbachov 'really' did want only to improve the existing system; however, and notwithstanding his intentions, his acts set in motion a process which

transformed the system from top to bottom. The 'truth' resided in what not only Gorbachov's distrustful critics took to be, but also what Gorbachov himself took to be, a mere external form.

'Essence', thus conceived, remains an empty determination whose adequacy can be tested only by verifying the extent to which it is expressed, rendered manifest, in the external form. We thus obtain the subsequent couple 'form/matter' in which the relationship is inverted. Form ceases to be a passive expression-effect, behind which one has to look for some hidden 'true essence', and becomes instead the agency which individuates the otherwise passive-formless matter, conferring on it some particular determination. In other words, the moment we become aware of how the entire determinedness of the essence resides in its form, essence, conceived abstractly from its form, changes into a formless substratum of the form; that is, into *matter*. As Hegel concisely puts it: the moment of determination and the moment of subsistence thereby fall apart, are posited as distinct; where a thing is concerned, 'matter' is the passive moment of subsistence (its substantial substratum-ground), whereas 'form' is what provides for its specific determination, what makes this thing what it is.

The dialectic which hampers this seemingly straight opposition is not limited to the fact that we never encounter 'pure' matter devoid of any form (the clay out of which a pot is made must already possess properties which make it appropriate for some form and not for another – for a pot, not for a needle, for example), so that 'pure' formless matter passes into its opposite, into an empty form-receptacle bereft of any concrete, positive, substantial determination, and vice versa, of course. But what Hegel has in mind here is something more radical: the inherent contradiction of the notion of form which designates both the principle of universalization and the principle of individuation. Form is what makes out of some formless matter a particular, determinate, thing (say, a cup out of clay); but it is at the same time the abstract Universal, common to different things (paper cups, glass cups, china cups and metal cups are all 'cups' on account of their common *form*). The only way out of this deadlock is to conceive matter not as something passive-formless, but as something which already in itself possesses an inherent structure, that is, something which stands opposite form and, at the same time, is furnished with its own *content*. But to avoid regression into the initial abstract counterposition of inner essence and externally imposed form, one has to keep in mind that *the couple content/form (or, more pointedly, content as such) is just another name for the tautological relationship by which form is related to itself*. For what is 'content' if not, precisely, *formed matter*? One can thus define 'form' as the way some content is actualized, realized, in matter (by means of the latter's adequate *formation*): 'the same content' – the story of Caesar's murder, for example – can be told in different forms, from Plutarch's historiographical report, through Shakespeare's play, to a Hollywood movie. Alternatively, one

can define form as the universality which unites the multitude of diverse contents (the form of the classical detective novel, for example, functions as the skeleton of codified genre rules which set a common seal on the works of authors as different as Agatha Christie, E.S. Gardner, and so on). In other words, and in so far as matter stands for the abstract Other of the form, 'content' is the way matter is mediated by form, and inversely, 'form' is the way content finds its expression in matter. In both cases, the relationship content/form, in contrast to the relationship matter/form, is *tautological*: 'content' is form itself in its oppositional determination.

With a view to the totality of this movement from essence/form to content/form, it is easy to perceive how its logic announces, in a condensed way, the triad of notion, judgement and syllogism, from that of the 'subjective logic', the third part of Hegel's *Logic*. The couple essence/form remains on the level of notion, that is, essence is the simple in-itself of the notion, of the substantial determination of an entity. The next step literally brings about the *Ur-Teilung*, judgement qua 'original division', the falling apart of the essence into its two constitutive moments that are thus 'posited' as such; that is to say, explicated, but in the mode of externality, that is, as external, indifferent to each other: the moment of subsistence (matter qua substratum) and the moment of determination (form). A substratum acquires determination when a form is predicated to it. The third step, finally, renders manifest the ternary structure of mediation, the distinguishing mark of syllogism, with form as its middle term.

Formal, Real, Complete Ground

There is something almost uncanny about the 'prophetic' dimensions of this apparently modest subdivision in Hegel's *Logic*; it is as if we can truly comprehend it only if we know the history of philosophy, and especially the crucial Hegel-critiques, of the next 150 years, inclusive of Althusser. Among other things, this subdivision anticipates both the young Marx's critique of Hegel and the concept of overdetermination which was developed by Althusser precisely as an alternative to the allegedly Hegelian notion of 'expressive causality'.

Formal ground repeats the tautological gesture of the immediate reference to 'true essence': it does not add any new content to the phenomenon to be explained, it just translates, transposes, the found empirical content into the form of ground. To comprehend this process, one need only recall how doctors sometimes respond when we describe our symptoms: 'Aha, clearly a case of . . .'. What then follows is a long, incomprehensible Latin term which simply translates the content of our complaints into medicalese, adding no new knowledge. Psychoanalytic theory itself offers one of the clearest

examples of what Hegel has in mind with 'formal ground', in the way it sometimes uses the notion of death-drive. Explaining the so-called 'negative therapeutic reaction' (more generally, of the phenomena of aggressivity, destructive rage, war, and so on) by invoking *Todestrieb* is a tautological gesture that only confers upon the same empirical content the universal form of law: people kill each other because they are driven to it by the death-drive. The principal target of Hegel himself is here a certain simplified version of Newtonian physics: this stone is heavy – why? On account of the force of gravity, and so on. But the bountiful sneers in Hegel's comments on formal ground should not blind us to its positive side for the necessary, constitutive, function of this formal gesture of converting contingent content that was simply found into the form of ground. It is easy to deride the tautological emptiness of this gesture, but Hegel's point lies elsewhere: by means of its very formal character, this gesture renders possible the search for the real ground. Formal causality qua empty gesture opens up the field of the analysis of content, as with Marx's *Capital*, wherein the formal subsumption of the process of production under capital precedes (comes before and opens up the way for) the material organization of production in accordance with the requirements of capital. (That is, first, the pre-capitalist material organization of production which was simply found – individual artisans, and so on – is formally subsumed under capital [for example, the capitalist provides the artisan with raw materials, etc.]; then, gradually, production is materially restructured into a collective manufacturing process directly run by the capitalist.)

Hegel further demonstrates how such tautological explanations, in order to conceal their true nature and to create an appearance of positive content, fill out again the empty form of ground with some fantasized, imaginary content, conceived as a new, special kind of actual empirical content: we thus obtain ether, magnetism, phlogiston, and other similar mysterious 'natural forces', where empty determinations-of-thought assume the form of positive, determinate content. In short, we obtain the inverted 'topsy-turvy world' in which the determinations-of-thought appear under the guise of their opposite, that is, the guise of positive empirical objects. (An exemplary case within philosophy itself, of course, is Descartes' placing of the link connecting body and soul within the pineal gland: this gland is nothing but a quasi-empirical positivization of the fact that Descartes was unable to *grasp conceptually* the mediation of thinking and extended substance in man.) For Hegel, the inverted 'topsy-turvy world' does not consist in presupposing, beyond the actual, empirical world, the kingdom of supra-sensible ideas. Rather, and in a kind of double inversion by means of which these supra-sensible ideas themselves assume again sensible form, the very sensible world is redoubled: as if, by the side of our ordinary sensible world, there exists another world of 'spiritual materiality' (of ether qua fine stuff, and so on). Why are Hegel's

considerations of such interest? They articulate, in advance, the motive that Feuerbach, the young Marx and Althusser proclaim as the 'critique of speculative idealism': that the hidden obverse and 'truth' of speculative idealism is positivism, an enslavement to contingent empirical content, that is, idealism only confers speculative form on the empirical content simply found there.¹⁹

The supreme case of such a quasi-empirical object that positivizes the subject's inability to think a purely conceptual relationship is provided by Kant himself, who, in his *Opus Posthumum*, proposes the hypothesis of ether.²⁰ If space is full, Kant reasoned, movement from one place in space to another is not possible since 'all places are already taken'. If, however, space is empty, no contact, no interaction can occur between two bodies separated by space since no force can be transmitted via pure void. From this paradox, Kant drew the conclusion that space is possible only if sustained by 'ether' qua all-pervasive, all-penetrating world-stuff which is practically the same as space itself hypostatically conceived: an all-present element which is space itself, which continuously fills it out and is as such the medium of the interaction of all other 'ordinary' positive forces and/or objects in space. This is what Hegel has in mind apropos of the 'topsy-turvy world': Kant solves the opposition of empty space and the objects filling it out by way of presupposing a 'matter' which is its opposite, that is, thoroughly transparent, homogeneous and continuous – similar to primitive religions with their notion of the Supra-sensible as an etherial-material Beyond. (The need for this hypothesis evaporates, of course, as soon as one accepts the post-Newtonian notion of non-homogeneous space.)²¹

Consequently, formal ground is followed by real ground: the difference between ground and grounded ceases to be purely formal. It is displaced into content itself and is conceived as the distinction between two of its constituents; in the very content of the phenomenon to be explained, one has to isolate some moment and to conceive of it as the 'ground' of all other moments which thereby appear as what is 'grounded'. In traditional Marxism, for example, the so-called 'economical basis' (that is, the structure of the process of production), is the moment that, notwithstanding the inconveniences of the notorious 'last instance', determines all other moments (political and ideological superstructure). Here, of course, the question emerges immediately: Why *this* moment and not some other? That is to say, as soon as we isolate some moment from the whole and conceive of it as its 'ground', we must also take into account the way ground itself is determined by the totality of relations within which it functions as ground: 'ground' can only exert its grounding function within a precisely defined network of conditions. In short, we can only ever answer the question 'Why *this* moment and not some other?' through the detailed analysis of the entire network of relations between the ground and the grounded. And that explains why it is

precisely this element of the network that plays the role of ground; for what is thus accomplished is the step to the next, final, modality of ground, in order to complete the ground. It is crucial to grasp the precise nature of Hegel's accomplishment: he does *not* put forward another, even 'deeper' supra-Ground which would ground the ground itself; he simply grounds the ground in the totality of its relations to the grounded content. In this precise sense, complete ground is the unity of formal and real ground: it is the real ground whose grounding relationship to the remaining content is again grounded. But in what is it grounded? *In itself; that is, in the totality of its relations to the grounded.* The ground grounds the grounded, but this grounding role must itself be grounded in the relationship of the ground to the grounded. Thus, we again arrive at the tautology (the moment of formal ground), but not at the empty tautology, as in the case of formal ground. Now, the tautology contains the moment of contradiction in the precise above-mentioned Hegelian sense. It designates the identity of the Whole with its 'oppositional determination': the identity of a moment of the Whole – the real ground – with the Whole itself.

In *Reading Capital*,²² Louis Althusser sought to illuminate the epistemological break of Marxism by means of a new concept of causality, that of 'over-determination'. Rather than posing an oppositional determination, he held that the very determining instance is overdetermined by the total network of relations within which it plays the determining role. Althusser contrasted this notion of causality to that of both mechanical transitive causality (the linear chain of causes and effects whose paradigmatic case is classical, pre-Einsteinian physics) and expressive causality (the inner essence which expresses itself in the multitude of its forms-of-appearance). 'Expressive causality', of course, targets Hegel in whose philosophy the same spiritual essence – *zeitgeist* – allegedly expresses itself at the different levels of society; for example, in religion as Protestantism, in politics as the liberation of civil society from the chains of medieval corporatism, in law as the rule of private property and the emergence of free individuals as its bearers. This triad of expressive-transitive-overdeterminant causality parallels the Lacanian triad Imaginary-Real-Symbolic. Expressive causality belongs to the level of the Imaginary; it designates the logic of an identical imago which leaves its imprint at different levels of material content. Overdetermination implies a symbolic totality, since such retroactive determination of the ground by the totality of the grounded is possible only within a symbolic universe. And, finally, transitive causality designates the senseless collisions of the real. Today, in the midst of ecological catastrophe, it is especially important that we conceive this catastrophe as a meaningless real *tusche*; that is, that we do not 'read meanings into things', as is done by those who interpret the ecological crisis as a 'deeper sign' of punishment for our merciless exploitation of nature, and so on. (Suffice it to recall the theories on the homology between the soul's inner world and the outer world of the universe which are again fashionable within the so-called

'New Age consciousness' – the exemplary case of a new rise of 'expressive causality').

It should be clear, now, that the Althusserian critical attribution to Hegel of 'expressive causality' misses the target: Hegel himself articulated, in advance, the conceptual framework of Althusser's critique. This is particularly clear given his triad of formal, real and complete ground, each of which corresponds perfectly to the triad of expressive, transitive and overdetermined causality. For, what is 'complete ground' if not the name for a 'complex structure' in which the determining instance itself is (over)determined by the network of relations within which it exerts its determining role?²³ In *Hegel ou Spinoza*?²⁴ Pierre Macherey rhetorically maintains that Spinoza's philosophy must be read as a critique of Hegel – as if Spinoza read Hegel and was able in advance to answer the latter's critique of 'Spinozism'. The same could be said of Hegel in relation to Althusser: Hegel outlines in advance the contours of the Althusserian critique of (what Althusser presents as) 'Hegelianism'. Moreover, Hegel develops the element that is missing in Althusser (the one that had prevented him from thinking through the notion of overdetermination); that is, the element of subjectivity that cannot be reduced to imaginary (mis)recognition qua effect of interpellation – that is to say, the subject as \S ; the 'empty', barred subject.

From 'In-itself' to 'For-itself'

Let us stop at this point and abstain from delineating the same matrix up to the final section of the second part of *Logic*. Suffice it to say that the fundamental antagonism of the entire logic of essence is the antagonism between *ground* and *conditions*; that is, between the inner essence ('true nature') of a thing and the external circumstances which render possible the realization of this essence – that is, the impossibility of reaching a common measure between these two dimensions, of coordinating them in a 'higher-order synthesis'. (It is only in the third part of *Logic*, with the 'subjective logic' of Notion, that this incommensurability is surpassed.) Therein consists the alternative between positing and external reflection: do people create the world they live in from within themselves, autonomously, or do their activities result from external circumstances? Philosophical commonsense would impose the compromise of a 'proper measure'; and true, we have the possibility of choice, for we can realize our freely conceived projects. But that recognition can only happen within the framework of tradition, that is, of the inherited circumstances which delineate our field of choices. Or, as Marx put it in his 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte': 'Men make their own history; but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by

themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.²⁵

And yet, it is precisely such a 'dialectical synthesis' that Hegel declines. For the whole point of his argument is that we have no way of drawing a line between the two aspects: every inner potential can be translated (its form can be converted) into an external condition, and vice versa. In short, what Hegel does here is something very exact: he undermines the usual notion of the relationship between the inner potentials of a thing and the external conditions that render (im)possible the realization of these potentials *by positing between these two sides the sign of equality*. The consequences are far more radical than they appear. They concern, above all, the radically anti-evolutionary character of Hegel's philosophy, as exemplified in the notional couple *in-itself/for-itself*. This couple is usually taken as the supreme proof of Hegel's trust in evolutionary progress (the development from 'in-itself' into 'for-itself'), but a closer look dispels this phantom of Evolution. For the 'in-itself' in its opposition to the 'for-itself' means at one and the same time: (i) that what exists only potentially, as an inner possibility, contrary to the actuality wherein a possibility has externalized and realized itself; *and* that (ii) actuality itself, in the sense of external, immediate, 'raw' objectivity which is still opposed to subjective mediation, which is not yet internalized, rendered conscious. In this sense, the 'in-itself' is actuality in so far as it has not yet reached its Notion.

The simultaneous reading of these two aspects undermines the usual idea of dialectical progress as a gradual realization of the object's inner potentials, as its spontaneous self-development. Hegel is here quite outspoken and explicit: the inner potentials of the self-development of an object and the pressure exerted on it by an external force are *strictly correlative*, they form the two parts of the same conjunction. In other words, the potentiality of the object must also be present in its external actuality, under the form of heteronomous coercion. For example (and the example here comes from Hegel himself), to say that a pupil at the beginning of the process of education is somebody who potentially knows, somebody who, in the course of his development, will realize his or her creative potentials, *equals saying* that these inner potentials must be present from the very beginning in external actuality as the authority of the Master who exerts pressure upon his or her pupil. Today, one can add to this the sadly-famous case of the working class qua revolutionary subject: to affirm that the working class is 'in itself', potentially, a revolutionary subject, equals the assertion that this potentiality must already be actualized in the Party which knows in advance about the revolutionary mission and therefore exerts pressure upon the working class, guiding it towards the realization of its potential. Thus the 'leading role' of the Party is legitimized, that is, its right to 'educate' the working class in accordance with its potential, to 'implant' in this class its historical mission, and so forth.

We can see, now, why Hegel is as far as is possible from the evolutionist notion of the progressive development of in-itself into for-itself: the category of 'in-itself' is strictly correlative to 'for us', that is, for some consciousness external to the thing-in-itself. To say that a clump of clay is 'in itself' a pot means the same thing as saying that this pot is already present in the mind of the craftsman who will impose the form of pot on the clay. The current way of saying 'under the right conditions the pupil will realize his or her potential' is thus deceptive. When, for example, in excuse for the pupil's *failure* to realize his potential, we insist that 'he would have realized it, if only the conditions had been right', we thereby commit an error of cynicism worthy of Brecht's famous lines from the *Threepenny Opera*: 'We would be good instead of being so rude, if only the circumstances were not of this kind!' For Hegel, then, external circumstances are not an impediment to realizing inner potentials, but on the contrary *the very arena in which the true nature of these inner potentials is to be tested*. But are such potentials true potentials or just vain illusions about what might have happened? Or, to put it in Spinozian terms, 'positing reflection' observes things as they are in their eternal essence, *sub specie aeternitatis*, whereas 'external reflection' observes them *sub specie durationis*, in their dependence on a series of contingent external circumstances. Here everything hinges on *how* Hegel overcomes 'external reflection'. If his aim were simply to reduce the externality of contingent conditions to the self-mediation of the inner essence-ground (the usual notion of 'Hegel's idealism'), then Hegel's philosophy would truly be a mere 'dynamized Spinozism'. But what does Hegel actually do?

Let us approach this problem via Lacan: in what precise sense can we maintain that Lacan of the late forties and early fifties was a Hegelian? In order to get a clear idea of his Hegelianism, it is sufficient to take a closer look at how he conceives of the analyst's 'passivity' in the psychoanalytical cure. Since 'the actual is rational', the analyst does not have to force her interpretations upon the analysand; all she has to do is clear the way for the analysand to arrive at his own truth by means of a mere punctuation of his speech. This is what Hegel has in mind when he speaks of the 'cunning of reason': the analyst does not seek to undermine the analysand's self-deceit, his attitude of the 'Beautiful Soul', by directly confronting him with the 'true state of things', but rather by giving him a free rein, of removing all obstacles that may serve as an excuse, thus compelling him to reveal 'the stuff he is actually made of'. In this precise sense 'the actual is rational'. And our — that is, the Hegelian philosopher's — trust in the inherent rationality of the actual means that actuality provides the only testing ground for the reasonableness of the subject's claims. Or, to put it slightly differently, the moment the subject is bereft of external obstacles which can be blamed for his failure, his subjective position will collapse on account of its inherent inauthenticity. What we have here is a kind of cynicized Heideggerianism: since the object is in itself inconsistent, since what allows it

to retain the appearance of consistency is the very external hindrance which allegedly restrains its inner potentials, then the most effective way to destroy it, to bring about its collapse, is precisely to renounce any claims of domination, to remove all hindrances and to 'let it be', that is, to leave the field open for the free deployment of its potentials.²⁶

However, does the Hegelian notion of the 'cunning of reason' not entail a 'regression' to pre-Kantian rationalist metaphysics? It is a philosophical commonplace to oppose here Kant's critique of the ontological proof of God's existence to Hegel's reaffirmation of it, and to quote Hegel's reaffirmation as the supreme proof of Hegel's return to the domain of classical metaphysics, but the story goes somewhat like this. Kant demonstrates that existence is not a predicate, since, at the level of predicates (which defines the notional content of a thing), there is absolutely no difference between 100 actual dollars and a mere notion of 100 dollars, and, *mutatis mutandis*, the same holds for the notion of God. Furthermore, one is even tempted to see in Kant's position a kind of prefiguration of the Lacanian eccentricity of the real with reference to the symbolic: existence is real in so far as it is irreducible to the network of notional-symbolic determinations. Nevertheless, this commonplace has to be rejected thoroughly.

Kant's actual line of argumentation is far more refined. He proceeds in two basic steps.²⁷ First, he demonstrates that there is still a hidden if-clause at work in the ontological proof of God's existence. True, God does designate a being whose existence is implied in its very notion, but we still must presuppose that such a being exists (that is, all that the ontological proof actually demonstrates is that, *if* God exists, he exists necessarily); so it remains possible that there is simply no such being whose notion would entail existence. An atheist would cite such a notion of God's nature as an argument *against* His existence: there is no God precisely because one cannot imagine in a consistent way a being whose notion would entail existence. Here Kant's next step aims at the same point: the only legitimate use of the term 'existence' is to designate the phenomenal reality of the objects of possible experience; and yet, *the difference between Reason and Intuition is constitutive of reality*. In other words, the subject accepts that something 'exists in reality' only in so far as its representation is filled out by the contingent, empirical content provided by intuition, that is, only in so far as the subject is passively affected by senses. Existence is not a predicate, that is, part of the notion of an object, precisely because, in order to pass from the notion to actual existence, one has to add the passive element of intuition. For that reason, the notion of 'necessary existence' is self-contradictory; *every existence is by definition contingent*.²⁸

What, then, is Hegel's answer to all this? Hegel in no way returns to traditional metaphysics. Instead, he refutes Kant within the horizon opened up by Kant himself. He, so to speak, approaches the problem from the opposite end: first by asking how does the 'coming-to-notion [*zum-Begriff-kommen*]

affect the existence of the object in question; and, more to the point, when a thing 'reaches its notion', what impact does this have on its existence? To clarify this question, let us recall an example confirming Lacan's thesis that Marxism is not a 'world view';²⁹ namely, the idea that the proletariat becomes an *actual* revolutionary subject by way of integrating the *knowledge* of its historical role.³⁰ Historical materialism, then, is not a neutral 'objective knowledge' of historical development, since it is an act of self-knowledge of a historical subject – an act that, as such, implies the proletarian subjective position. In other words, the 'knowledge' proper to historical materialism is self-referential; it changes its 'object'. Indeed, it is only via the act of knowledge that the object becomes what it truly 'is'. So, the rise of 'class-consciousness' produces the effect in the existence of its 'object' (the proletariat) by way of changing it into an actual revolutionary subject. Is it not the same with psychoanalysis? Doesn't the interpretation of a symptom constitute a direct intervention of the Symbolic in the Real; doesn't it offer an example of how the word can affect the Real of the symptom? And, on the other hand, doesn't such an efficacy of the Symbolic presuppose entities whose existence literally hinges on a certain non-knowledge? For, the moment knowledge is assumed (through interpretation), existence disintegrates. Here, existence is not one of the predicates of a Thing, but designates the way the Thing relates to its predicates; or, rather, the way the Thing *is related to itself* by means of (through the detour of) its predicates-properties.³¹ When a proletarian becomes aware of his or her 'historical role', *none of their actual predicates change*. What changes is just the way he or she relates to them, and this change in the relationship to predicates radically affects their existence.

To designate this awareness of 'historical role', traditional Marxism makes use of the Hegelian couple 'in-itself/ for-itself'. Hence, by way of arriving at its 'class-consciousness', the proletariat changes from a 'class-in-itself' to a 'class-for-itself'. The dialectic at work here is that of a *failed encounter*: the passage to 'for itself', to the Notion, involves the loss of existence. Nowhere is this failed encounter more obvious than in a passionate love affair: its 'in itself' occurs when I simply yield to the passion, unaware of what is happening to me; afterwards, when the affair is over, *aufgehoben* in my recollection, it becomes 'for itself' – I retroactively become aware of what I had, of what I lost. This awareness of what I lost gives birth to the fantasy of the impossible conjunction of being and knowledge ('if only I would have known how happy I was . . .'). But is the Hegelian 'in-and-for-itself [*An-und-Fuer-sich*]' really such an impossible conjunction, the fantasy of a moment when I am happy and I know it? Is it not rather the unmasking of the illusion of the 'external reflection' that still pertains to 'for-itself'; that is, to the illusion that, in the past, I actually *was* happy without knowing it? Is it not precisely the insight into how 'happiness' by definition comes to be, retroactively, by means of the experience of its loss?

This illusion of the external reflection can be further exemplified by *Billy*

Bathgate, the film based on E.L. Doctorow's novel. The film is fundamentally a failed version of the novel and the impression it arouses is that what we see is a pale, distorted reflection of its, far superior, literary source. There is, however, an unpleasant surprise in store for those who, after seeing the film, set about to read the novel: the novel is far closer to the insipid happy end (wherein, Billy pockets the hidden wealth of Dutch Schultz). Moreover, numerous delicate details that the spectator unacquainted with the novel experiences as fragments happily not lost in the impoverishing process of transposition to cinema – fragments that miraculously survived the shipwreck – actually turn out to be added by the scriptwriter. In short, the 'superior' novel evoked by the film's failure is not the pre-existent actual novel upon which the film is based, but a retroactive chimera aroused by the film itself.³²

Ground versus Conditions

This conceptual background allows us to reformulate the vicious circle of ground and conditions. Let us recall the usual mode of explaining outbreaks of racism, which invokes the categorial couple of ground and conditions-circumstances: one conceives of racism (or, more generally, so-called 'outbreaks of irrational mass-sadism') as a latent psychic disposition, a kind of Jungian archetype which comes forth under certain conditions (social instability and crisis, and so on). From this point of view, the racist disposition is the 'ground' and current political struggles the 'circumstances', the conditions of its effectuation. However, what counts as ground and what counts as conditions is ultimately contingent and exchangeable, so that one can easily accomplish the Marxist reversal of the above-mentioned psychologist perspective and conceive the present political struggle as the only true determining ground. In the present civil war in ex-Yugoslavia, for example, the 'ground' of Serbian aggression is not to be sought in any primitive Balkan warrior archetype, but in the struggle for power in post-Communist Serbia (the survival of the old Communist state apparatus). Indeed, the status of eventual Serbian bellicose dispositions and other similar archetypes (the 'Croatian genocidal character', the 'centennial tradition of ethnic hatreds in the Balkans', and so on) is precisely that of the conditions/circumstances in which the power-struggle realizes itself. The 'bellicose dispositions' are precisely that – latent dispositions which are actualized, drawn forth from their shadowy half-existence by the recent political struggle qua their determining ground. One is thus fully justified in saying that 'what is at stake in the Yugoslav civil war are not archaic ethnic conflicts: these centennial hatreds are inflamed only on account of their function in the recent political struggle'.³³

How, then, are we to eschew this mess, this exchangeability of ground and

circumstance? Let us take another example: *renaissance*, that is, the rediscovery ('rebirth') of antiquity which exerted a crucial influence on the break with the medieval way of life in the fifteenth century. The first, obvious explanation is that the influence of the newly discovered antique tradition brought about the dissolution of the medieval 'paradigm'. Here, however, a question immediately arises: why did antiquity begin to exert its influence at precisely that moment and not earlier or later? The answer that offers itself, of course, is that due to the dissolution of medieval social links, a new '*zeitgeist*' emerged which made us responsive to antiquity – something must have changed in 'us' so that we became able to perceive antiquity not as a pagan kingdom of sin but as the model to be adopted. That's all very well, but we still remain locked in a vicious circle, since this new '*zeitgeist*' itself took shape precisely through the discovery of antique texts as well as fragments of classical architecture and sculpture. In a way, everything was already there, in the external circumstances; the new '*zeitgeist*' formed itself through the influence of antiquity which enabled renaissance thought to shatter the medieval chains. And yet, for this influence of antiquity to be felt, the new '*zeitgeist*' must already have been active. The only way out of this impasse is thus the intervention, at a certain point, of a tautological gesture: the new '*zeitgeist*' had to constitute itself by literally *presupposing itself in its exteriority*, in its external conditions (in antiquity). In other words, it was not sufficient for the new '*zeitgeist*' retroactively to posit these external conditions (the antique tradition) as 'its own', it had to (presup)pose itself as already-present in these conditions. Or, to put it directly, *the return to external conditions (to antiquity) had to coincide with the return to the foundation, to the 'thing itself', to the ground.* (This is precisely how the 'renaissance' conceived itself: as the return to the Greek and Roman foundations of our Western civilization.) We do not, as a consequence, have an inner ground, the actualization of which depends on external circumstance. Instead, the external relation of presupposing (ground presupposes conditions and vice versa) is surpassed in a pure tautological gesture by means of which the thing *presupposes itself*. This tautological gesture is 'empty' in the precise sense that it does not contribute anything new; it only retroactively ascertains that the thing in question *is already present in its conditions*, that is, that the totality of these conditions *is* the actuality of the thing. Such an empty gesture provides us with the most elementary definition of the *symbolic* act.

Here we see the fundamental paradox of 'rediscovering tradition' at work in the constitution of national identity: a nation finds its sense of self-identity by means of such a tautological gesture, that is, by way of discovering itself as already present in its tradition. Consequently, the mechanism of the 'rediscovery of national tradition' cannot be reduced to the 'positing of presuppositions' in the sense of the retroactive positing of conditions as 'ours'. The point is rather that, in the very act of returning to its (external) conditions,

the (national) thing returns to itself; the return to conditions is experienced as the 'return to our true roots'.

The Tautological 'Return of the Thing to Itself'

Now, although 'actually existing socialism' has already receded into a distance which confers upon it the nostalgic magic of a post-modern lost object, some of us still recall a well-known joke about what socialism is: a social system that is the dialectical synthesis of all previous history. From the prehistoric classless society, it took primitivism; from antiquity, slave labour; from medieval feudalism, ruthless domination; from capitalism, exploitation; *and from socialism, the name*. This is what the Hegelian tautological gesture of the 'return of the thing to itself' is all about: one must include along with the definition of the object its name. That is to say, after we decompose an object into its ingredients, we look in vain in them for some specific feature which holds together this multitude and makes of it a unique, self-identical thing. But as to its properties and ingredients, a thing is wholly 'outside itself', in its external conditions, every positive feature is already present in the circumstances which are not yet this thing. The supplementary operation which produces from this bundle a unique, self-identical thing is the purely symbolic, tautological gesture of positing these external conditions as the conditions-components of the thing and, simultaneously, of presupposing the existence of ground which holds together this multitude of conditions.

And, to throw our Lacanian cards on the table, this tautological 'return of the thing to itself' (which renders forth the concrete structure of self-identity) is what Lacan designates as the '*point de capiton*', the 'quilting point', at which the signifier 'falls into' the signified (as in the above-mentioned joke on socialism, where the name itself functions as part of the designated thing). Let us recall an example from popular film culture: the killer shark in Spielberg's *Jaws*. A direct search for the shark's ideological meaning evokes nothing but misguided questions: does it symbolize the threat of the Third World to America epitomized by the archetypal small town? Is it the symbol of the exploitative nature of capitalism itself (Fidel Castro's interpretation)? Does it stand for the untamed nature which threatens to disrupt the routine of our daily lives? In order to avoid this lure, we have to shift our perspective radically: the daily life of the common man is dominated by an inconsistent multitude of fears (he can become the victim of big business manipulations; Third World immigrants seem to intrude into his small orderly universe; unruly nature can destroy his home; and so forth), and the accomplishment of *Jaws* consists in an act of purely formal conversion which provides a common 'container' for all these free-floating, inconsistent fears by way of anchoring them, 'reifying' them, in the figure of the shark.³⁴ Consequently, the function

of the fascinating presence of the shark is precisely to *block* any further inquiry into the social meaning (social mediation) of those phenomena that arouse fear in the common man. But to say that the murderous shark 'symbolizes' the above-mentioned series of fears is to say both too much and not enough at the same time. It does not symbolize them, since it literally annuls them by occupying itself the place of the object of fear. It is therefore 'more' than a symbol; it becomes the feared 'thing itself'. Yet, the shark is decidedly less than a symbol, since it does not point towards the symbolized content but rather blocks access to it, renders it invisible. In this way, it is homologous with the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew: 'Jew' is the explanation offered by anti-Semitism for the multiple fears experienced by the 'common man' in an epoch of dissolving social links (inflation, unemployment, corruption, moral degradation); behind all these phenomena lies the invisible hand of the 'Jewish plot'. However, the crucial point here, again, is that the designation 'Jew' *does not add any new content*: the entire content is already present in the external conditions (crisis, moral degeneration, and so on); the name 'Jew' is only the supplementary feature which accomplishes a kind of transubstantiation, changing all these elements into so many manifestations of the same *ground*, the 'Jewish plot'. Paraphrasing the joke on socialism, one could say that anti-Semitism takes from the economy, unemployment and inflation; from politics, parliamentary corruption and intrigue; from morality, its own degeneration; from art, 'incomprehensible' avant-gardism; *and from the Jew, the name*. This name enables us to recognize behind the multitude of external conditions the activity of the same *ground*.

Here we also find at work the dialectic of contingency and necessity. As to their content, they fully coincide (in both cases, the only positive content is the series of conditions that form part of our actual life-experience: economic crisis, political chaos, the dissolution of ethical links, and so on); the passage of contingency into necessity is an act of purely formal conversion, the gesture of adding a *name* which confers upon the contingent series the mark of necessity, thereby transforming it into the expression of some hidden ground (the 'Jewish plot'). This is also how later – at the very end of the 'logic of essence' – we pass from absolute necessity to freedom. To comprehend properly this passage, one has to renounce thoroughly the standard notion of 'freedom as comprehended necessity' (after getting rid of the illusions of free will, one can recognize and freely accept one's place in the network of causes and their effects). But Hegel's point, on the contrary, is that *it is only the subject's (free) act of 'dotting the i' which retroactively installs necessity*, so that the very act by means of which the subject recognizes (and thus constitutes) necessity is the supreme act of freedom and, as such, the self-suppression of necessity. *Voilà pourquoi Hegel n'est pas spinoziste*: on account of this tautological gesture of retroactive performativity. So 'performativity' in no way designates the power of freely 'creating' the designated content ('words mean what we want them to mean',

and so forth); the 'quilting' only structures the material which is found, externally imposed. The act of naming is 'performative' only and precisely in so far as *it is always-already part of the definition of the signified content*.³⁵

This is how Hegel resolves the deadlock of positing and external reflection, the vicious circle of positing the presuppositions and of enumerating the presuppositions of the posited content: by means of the tautological return-upon-itself of the thing in its very external presuppositions. And the same tautological gesture is already at work in Kant's analytic of pure reason: the synthesis of the multitude of sensations in the representation of the object which belongs to 'reality' implies an empty surplus, that is, the positing of an X as the unknown substratum of the perceived phenomenal sensations. Suffice it to quote Findlay's precise formulation:

[W]e always refer appearances to a Transcendental Object, an X, of which we, however, know nothing, but which is nonetheless the objective correlate of the synthetic acts inseparable from thinking self-consciousness. The Transcendental Object, thus conceived, can be called a Noumenon or thing of thought [*Gedankending*]. But the reference to such a thing of thought does not, strictly speaking, use the categories, but is something like *an empty synthetic gesture* in which nothing objective is really put before us.³⁶

The transcendental object is thus the very opposite of the *Ding-an-sich*: it is 'empty' in so far as it is devoid of any 'objective' content. That is to say, to obtain its notion, one has to abstract from the sensible object its entire sensible content, that is, all sensations by means of which the subject is affected by *Ding*. The empty X which remains is *the pure objective correlate/effect of the subject's autonomous-spontaneous synthetic activity*. Or, to put it paradoxically, the transcendental object is the 'in-itself' in so far as it is for the subject, posited by it; it is pure 'positedness' of an indeterminate X. This 'empty synthetic gesture' – which adds to the thing nothing positive, no new sensible feature, and yet, in its very capacity of an empty gesture, constitutes it, makes it into an object – is the act of *symbolization* in its most elementary form, at its zero-level. On the first page of his book, Findlay points out that the transcendental object:

is not for Kant different from the object or objects which appear to the senses and which we can judge about and know . . . but it is the *same* object or objects conceived in respect of certain intrinsically unapparent features, and which is in such respects incapable of being judged about or known.³⁷

This X, this unrepresentable surplus which adds itself to the series of sensible features, is precisely the 'thing-of-thought [*Gedankending*]': it bears witness to the fact that the object's unity does not reside within it, but is the result of the subject's synthetic activity. (As with Hegel, where the act of formal conversion

inverts the chain of conditions into the unconditional Thing, founded in itself.) Let us briefly return to anti-Semitism, to the 'synthetic act of apperception' which, out of the multitude of (imagined) features of Jews, constructs the anti-Semitic figure of 'Jew'. To pass for a true anti-Semite, it is not enough to claim that we oppose Jews because they are exploitative, greedy intriguers; that is, it is not sufficient for the signifier 'Jew' to designate this series of specific, positive features. One has to accomplish the crucial step further by saying 'they are like that (exploitative, greedy, and so forth) *because they are Jews*'. The 'transcendental object' of Jewishness is precisely that elusive X which 'makes a Jew into a Jew' and for which we look in vain among his or her positive properties. This act of pure formal conversion, that is, the 'synthetic act' of uniting the series of positive features in the signifier 'Jew' and thereby transforming them into so many manifestations of the 'Jewishness' qua their hidden ground, *brings about the appearance of an objective surplus*, of a mysterious X which is 'in Jew more than Jew'; in other words, of the transcendental object.³⁸ In the very text of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, this void of the synthetic gesture is indicated by an exception in the use of the pair constitutive/regulative:³⁹ in general, 'constitutive' principles serve to construct objective reality, whereas 'regulative' principles are merely subjective maxims which guide reason without giving access to positive knowledge. However, when Kant speaks of existence [*Dasein*], he makes use of the pair constitutive/regulative in the midst of the very domain of the constitutive, by way of linking it to the couple mathematical/dynamical:

In the application of pure conceptions of understanding to possible experience, the employment of their synthesis is either *mathematical* or *dynamical*; for it is concerned partly with the mere *intuition* of an appearance in general, partly with its *existence*.⁴⁰

In what precise sense, then, are dynamical principles 'merely regulative principles, and distinguished from the mathematical, which are constitutive'?⁴¹ The principles of the mathematical use of categories refer to the intuited phenomenal content (to phenomenal properties of the thing); it is only the dynamical principles of synthesis which guarantee that the content of our representations refers to some objective existence, independent of the flux of perceiving consciousness. How, then, are we to explain the paradox of making objective existence dependent not on 'constitutive' but on 'regulative' principles? Let us return, for the last time, to the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew: mathematical synthesis can only gather together phenomenal properties attributed to the Jew (greediness, intriguing spirit, and so forth). But then dynamical synthesis accomplishes the reversal by means of which this series of properties is posited as the manifestation of an inaccessible X, 'Jewishness'; that is to say, of something *real*, really existing. At work here are regulative principles, since dynamical synthesis is not limited to phenomenal features,

but refers them to their underlying-unknowable substratum, to the transcendental object. In this precise sense, the existence of 'Jew' as irreducible to the series of predicates, that is, his existence as pure positing [*Setzung*] of the transcendental object qua substratum of phenomenal predicates, hinges on dynamical synthesis. In Lacanian terms, dynamical synthesis posits the existence of an X as the trans-phenomenal 'hard kernel of being' beyond predicates (which is why the hatred of Jews does not concern their phenomenal properties but aims at their hidden 'kernel of being') – a new proof of how 'reason' is at work in the very heart of 'understanding' in the most elementary positing of an object as 'really existing'. It is therefore deeply significant that, throughout the subdivision on the second analogy of experience, Kant consistently uses the word *Objekt* (designating an intelligible entity) and not *Gegenstand* (designating a simple phenomenal entity): the external, objective existence achieved by the synthetic use of dynamic regulative principles is 'intelligible', not empirical-intuitive; that is, it adds to the intuitive-sensible features of the object an intelligible, non-sensible X and thus makes an object out of it.

In this precise sense Hegel remains within Kant's fundamental framework. But, then, in what resides the fundamental paradox of Kant's transcendentalism? For Kant's initial problem is that given, for example, my senses bombard me with a confused multitude of representations, how am I to distinguish, in this flux, between mere 'subjective' representations and objects that exist independently of the flux of representations? The answer: my representations acquire 'objective status' via transcendental synthesis which changes them into the objects of experience. What I experience as 'objective' existence, the very 'hard kernel' of the object beneath the ever-changing phenomenal fluctuations, independent of the flux of my consciousness, thus results from my (the subject's) own 'spontaneous' synthetic activity. And, *mutatis mutandis*, Hegel says the same thing: the establishment of absolute necessity equals its self-cancellation, that is, it designates the act of freedom which retroactively 'posits' something as necessary.

The 'Absolute Unrest of Becoming'

The trouble with contingency resides in its uncertain status. Is it ontological, that is, are things *in themselves* contingent, or is it epistemological, that is, is contingency merely an expression of the fact that *we do not know* the complete chain of causes which brought about the allegedly 'contingent' phenomenon? Hegel undermines the common supposition of this alternative, namely the external relationship of being and knowledge: the notion of 'reality' as something that is simply given, that exists 'out there', prior and external to the process of knowledge. The difference between the ontological and the

epistemological version is only that, in the first case, contingency is part of this reality itself, whereas in the second case, reality is wholly determined by necessity. In contrast to both these versions, Hegel affirms the basic thesis of speculative idealism: the process of knowledge (that is, our comprehending the object) is not something external to the object but inherently determines its status. As Kant puts it, the conditions of possibility of our experience are also the conditions of possibility of the objects of experience. In other words, while contingency does express the incompleteness of our knowledge, *this incompleteness also ontologically defines the object of knowledge itself*. It bears witness to the fact that the object itself is not yet ontologically 'realized', fully actual. The merely epistemological status of contingency is thus invalidated, without us falling back into ontological naivety: behind the appearance of contingency there is no hidden, not-yet-known necessity, but *only the necessity of the very appearance that, behind superficial contingency, there is an underlying substantial necessity*. And this is similar to the case of anti-Semitism, where the ultimate appearance is the very appearance of the underlying necessity, that is, the appearance that, behind the series of actual features (unemployment, moral disintegration, and so on), there is the hidden necessity of the 'Jewish plot'. Therein consists the Hegelian inversion of 'external' into 'absolute' reflection: in external reflection, appearance is the elusive surface concealing its hidden necessity, whereas in absolute reflection, appearance is the appearance of this very (unknown) Necessity behind contingency. Or, to make use of an even more 'Hegelian' speculative formulation, if contingency is an appearance concealing some hidden necessity, then this necessity is *stricto sensu an appearance of itself*.

This inherent antagonism of the relationship between contingency and necessity offers an exemplary case of the Hegelian triad: first the 'naive' ontological conception which locates the difference in things themselves (some events are in themselves contingent, others necessary), and then the attitude of 'external reflection' which conceives of this difference as purely epistemological, that is, dependent upon the incompleteness of our knowledge (we experience as 'contingent' an event when the complete causal chain that produced it remains beyond our grasp). But what, then, what exactly would be the third choice – other than the seemingly exhaustive one between ontology and epistemology? Answer: *the very relationship between possibility (qua subjective seizing of actuality) and actuality (qua the object of conceptual seizing)*. Here we find, then, that both contingency and necessity are categories which express the dialectical unity of the actual and possible. They are to be distinguished only in so far as contingency designates this unity conceived in the mode of subjectivity, of the 'absolute unrest' of becoming, of the split between subject and object, and 'necessity' of this same content conceived in the mode of objectivity, of determinate being, of the identity of subject and object, of the rest of the Result.⁴² In short, we are

again at the category of pure *formal conversion*, the change concerns only the modality of form:

This *absolute unrest* of the *becoming* of these two determinations is *contingency*. But just because each immediately turns into its opposite, equally in this other it simply *unites with itself*, and this identity of both, of one in the other, is *necessity*.⁴³

Hegel's counter position here was adopted by Kierkegaard, with his notion of the two different modalities of observing a process: from the standpoint of 'becoming' and from the standpoint of 'being'.⁴⁴ 'After the fact', history can always be read as a process governed by laws; that is, as a meaningful succession of stages. However, in so far as we are history's agents, caught, indeed embedded, in the process, the situation appears – at least at the turning points when 'something is happening' – open, undecidable, far from the exposition of an underlying necessity. We must bear in mind here the lesson on the mediation of the subjective attitude with objectivity: we cannot reduce one perspective to another by claiming, for example, that the 'true' picture is that of necessity discovered by the 'backward view', that freedom is just an illusion of the immediate agents who overlook how their activity is a small wheel within the large causal mechanism. Or, conversely, we cannot reduce one to another by embracing a kind of Sartrean existentialist perspective, affirming, in so doing, the subject's ultimate autonomy and freedom, and conceiving the appearance of determinism as the later 'pratico-inert' objectivization of the subject's spontaneous *praxis*. In both cases, the ontological unity of the universe is saved, whether in the form of substantial necessity pulling the strings behind the subject's back or in the form of the subject's autonomous activity 'objectivizing' itself in substantial unity. But what gets lost is the ontological scandal of the ultimate *undecidability* between the two choices. Here Hegel is far more subversive than Kierkegaard, since the latter escapes the deadlock only by giving preference to possibility over actuality – an escape that ends up announcing the Bergsonian notion of actuality qua mechanical congealation of the life-process.⁴⁵

In this undecidability lies the ultimate ambiguity of Hegel's philosophy, the index of an impossibility by way of which it 'touches the real': how are we to conceive of the dialectical re-collection?⁴⁶ Is it a retroactive glance enabling us to discern the contours of inner necessity where the view immersed in the events can only perceive an interplay of accidents, that is, as the 'sublation [*Aufhebung*]' of this interplay of accidents in underlying logical necessity? Or is it, on the contrary, a glance enabling us to resuscitate the openness of the situation, its 'possibility', its irreducible contingency, in what afterwards, from objective distance, appears as a necessary objective process? And does not this undecidability bring us back to our starting point: is

not this ambiguity again the way sexual difference is inscribed into the very core of Hegel's logic?

Actuality of the Possible

The ontological background of this ambiguity is a kind of 'trading of places' between possibility and actuality: possibility itself, in its very opposition to actuality, possesses an actuality of its own. In what precise sense do we mean this? Hegel always insists on the absolute primacy of actuality: true, the search for the 'conditions of possibility' abstracts from the actual, calls it in question, in order to (re)constitute it on a rational basis; yet in all these ruminations actuality is presupposed as something given. In other words, nothing is stranger to Hegel than Leibnizian speculation about the multitude of possible worlds out of which the Creator picks out the best; speculation on possible universes always takes place against the background of the hard fact of actual existence. On the other hand, there is always something traumatic about the raw factuality of what we encounter as 'actual', since actuality is always marked by an indelible brand of the (real as) 'impossible'. The shift from actuality to possibility, the suspension of actuality through inquiry into its possibility, is therefore ultimately an endeavour to avoid the trauma of the real, that is, to integrate the real by means of conceiving it as something that is meaningful within our symbolic universe.⁴⁷

Of course, this squaring of the circle of the possible and the actual (that is, first the suspension of actuality and then its derivation from the conceptual possibility), never works out, as proven by the very category of contingency. For 'contingency' designates an actual content in so far as it cannot be wholly grounded in its conceptual conditions of possibility. According to philosophical common sense, contingency and necessity are the two modalities of actuality: something actual is necessary in so far as its contrary is not possible; it is contingent in so far as its contrary is also possible (in so far as things could also have turned out otherwise). The problem, however, resides in the inherent antagonism that pertains to the notion of possibility: possibility designates something 'possible' in the sense of being able to actualize itself, as well as something 'merely possible' as opposed to being actual. This inner split finds its clearest expression, perhaps, in the diametrically opposed roles played by the notion of possibility in moral argumentation. On the one hand, we have the 'empty possibility', the eternal excuse of the weak: 'If I really wanted to, I could have . . . [stopped smoking, or whatever]'. In challenging this claim, Hegel again and again points out how the true nature of a possibility (is it a true possibility or a mere empty presumption?) is confirmed only by way of its actualization: the only effective proof that you really can do something is simply to do it. On the other hand, the possibility of acting differently exerts

pressure on us in the guise of the 'voice of conscience': when I offer the usual excuses ('I did all that was possible, there was no choice'), the superego-voice keeps gnawing at me, 'No, you could have done more!' This is what Kant has in mind when he insists that freedom is actual already as possibility: when I gave way to pathological impulses and did not carry out my duty, the *actuality* of my freedom is attested to by my awareness of how I *could have* acted otherwise.⁴⁸ This is also what Hegel aims at when maintaining that the actual [*das Wirkliche*] is not the same as that which simply exists [*das Bestehende*]: my conscience pricks me when my act (of giving way to pathological impulses) was not 'actual', did not express my true moral nature – this difference exerts pressure on me in the guise of 'conscience'.

One can discern the same logic behind the recent revival of the conspiracy theory (Oliver Stone's *JFK*): who was behind Kennedy's murder? The ideological cathexis of this revival is clear: Kennedy's murder acquired such traumatic dimensions retroactively, from the later experience of the Vietnam War, of the Nixon administration's cynical corruption, and of the revolt of the sixties that opened up the gap between the young generation and the establishment. This later experience transformed Kennedy into a person who, had he remained alive, would have spared us Vietnam, the gap separating the sixties generation from the establishment, and so on. (What the conspiracy theory 'represses', of course, is the painful fact of Kennedy's *impotence*: Kennedy himself would not have been able to prevent the emergence of this gap.) The conspiracy theory thus keeps alive the dream of another America, different from the one we came to know in the seventies and eighties.⁴⁹

Hegel's position with regard to the relationship of possibility and actuality is thus very refined and precise: possibility is simultaneously less and more than what its notion implies. Conceived in its abstract opposition to actuality, it is a 'mere possibility' and, as such, coincides with its opposite, impossibility. On another level, however, possibility already possesses a certain actuality *in its very capacity of possibility*, which is why any further demand for its actualization is superfluous. In this sense, Hegel points out that the idea of freedom realizes itself through a series of failures: every particular attempt to realize freedom may fail; from its point of view, freedom remains an empty possibility – but the very continuous striving of freedom to realize itself bears witness to its 'actuality', that is, to the fact that freedom is not a 'mere notion', but manifests a tendency that pertains to the very essence of reality. On the other hand, the supreme case of 'mere possibility' is the Hegelian 'abstract universal'. What we have in mind here is the well-known paradox of the relationship between universal judgement and judgement of existence in the classical Aristotelian syllogism: judgement of existence implies the existence of its subject, whereas universal judgement can also be true even if its subject does not exist, since it concerns only the notion of the subject. If, for example, one says 'At least one man is (or: some men are) mortal', this judgement is true only if at least one

man exists. If, on the contrary, one says 'A unicorn has only one horn', this judgement remains true even if there are no unicorns, since it concerns solely the immanent determination of the notion of 'unicorn'. Far from its relevance being limited to pure theoretical ruminations, this gap between the universal and the particular has palpable material effects – in politics, for example. According to the results of a public-opinion poll in the autumn of 1991, in the choice between Bush and a non-specified Democratic candidate, the non-specified Democrat would win easily. However, in the choice between Bush and any concrete, individual Democrat, provided with face and name (Kerrey, Cuomo, or whatever), Bush would have an easy win. In short, the Democrat in general wins over Bush, whereas Bush wins over any concrete Democrat. To the misfortune of the Democrats, there is no 'Democrat in general'.⁵⁰

The status of possibility, while different from that of actuality, is thus not simply deficient with regard to it. Rather, *possibility, as such, exerts actual effects which disappear as soon as it 'actualizes' itself*. Such a 'short-circuit' between possibility and actuality is at work in the Lacanian notion of 'symbolic castration': the so-called 'castration-anxiety' cannot be reduced to the psychological fact that, upon perceiving the absence of the penis in woman, man becomes afraid that 'he also might lose it'.⁵¹ Rather, 'castration anxiety' designates the precise moment at which the possibility of castration takes precedence over its actuality, that is, the moment at which the very possibility of castration, its mere threat, produces actual effects in our psychic economy. This threat, as it were, 'castrates' us, branding us with an irreducible loss. And it is this same 'short-circuit' between possibility and actuality which defines the very notion of power: power is *actually* exerted only in the guise of a *potential* threat, that is, only in so far as it does not strike fully but 'keeps itself in reserve'.⁵² Suffice it to recall the logic of paternal authority: the moment a father loses control and displays his full power (starts to shout, to beat a child), we necessarily perceive this display as impotent rage – as an index of its very opposite. In this precise sense symbolic authority always, by definition, hinges on an irreducible potentiality-possibility, on the actuality-effectivity that pertains to possibility qua possibility: we leave behind the 'raw', pre-symbolic real and enter the symbolic universe the moment possibility acquires actuality of its own. This paradox is at work in the Hegelian struggle for recognition between the [future] Lord and Bondsman: to say that the impasse of their struggle is resolved by way of the Lord's *symbolic* victory and the Bondsman's *symbolic* death equals saying that the mere *possibility* of victory is sufficient; the symbolic pact at work in their struggle enables them to stop before the actual physical destruction and to accept the possibility of victory as its actuality. In this sense, too, then, the Master's potential threat is far worse than his or her actual display of power. This is what Bentham counts on in his fantasy-matrix of Panopticon: the fact that the Other – the gaze in the central observing tower

– *can* watch me, that is, my radical uncertainty as to whether I am being observed or not at any precise moment gives rise to an anxiety far greater than that aroused by the awareness that I am actually observed. This surplus of what is ‘in the possibility more than a mere possibility’ and which gets lost in its actualization is *the real qua impossible*.

Notes

1. Perspicuous theologians know very well this paradox of a decision that retroactively posits its own reasons: of course there are good reasons to believe in Jesus Christ, *but these reasons are fully comprehensible only to those who already believe in Him*.

2. It was the same with Ronald Reagan’s presidency: the more liberal journalists enumerated his slips of tongue and other *faux pas*, the more they (unknowingly) strengthened his popularity – reasons against functioned as reasons for. As to Reagan’s ‘teflon presidency’, see Joan Copjec, ‘The *unermöglicher* Other: Hysteria and Democracy in America’, *New Formations*, 14 (London: Routledge 1991). On another level, an exemplary case of this gap separating S_1 from S_2 (i.e., the act of decision from the chain of knowledge) is provided by the institution of jury. The jury performs the formal act of decision, it delivers the verdict of ‘guilt’ or ‘innocence’; then it is up to the judge to ground this decision in knowledge, to translate it into an appropriate punishment. Why can’t these two instances coincide, i.e. why can’t the judge himself decide the verdict? Is he not better qualified than an average citizen? Why is it repulsive to our sense of justice to leave the decision to the judge? For Hegel, the jury embodies the principle of free subjectivity: the crucial fact about the jury is that it comprises a group of citizens who allegedly are peers of the accused and who are selected by a lottery system – they stand for ‘anybody’. The point is that I can be judged only by my equals, not by a superior agency speaking in the name of some inaccessible Knowledge beyond my reach and comprehension. At the same time, the jury implies an aspect of contingency which suspends the principle of sufficient ground. If the concern of justice were only to be the correct application of law, it would be far more appropriate for the judge to decide on guilt or innocence. By entrusting the jury with the verdict, the moment of uncertainty is preserved; up to the end we cannot be sure what the judgment will be, so its actual pronouncement always affects us as a surprise.

3. The paradox, of course, consists precisely in the fact that, there is *nothing* behind the series of positive, observable features: the status of that mysterious *je ne sais quoi* which makes me fall in love is ultimately that of a pure semblance. This way, we can see how a ‘sincere’ feeling is necessarily based upon an illusion (I am ‘really’, ‘sincerely’, in love only in so far as I believe in your secret *agalma*; i.e. in so far as I believe that there is something behind the series of observable features).

4. As for this ‘Incorporation Thesis’, see Henry E. Allison’s *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990).

5. The adverse procedure is also false, that is, the attribution of personal responsibility and guilt which relieves us of the task of probing into the concrete circumstances of the act in question. Suffice it to recall the moral-majority practice of attributing a moral character to the higher crime rate among African Americans (‘criminal dispositions’, ‘moral insensitivity’, etc.): this attribution precludes any analysis of the concrete social, economic and political conditions of African Americans.

6. When we desire X, we always identify ourselves with a certain self-image (‘ideal ego’) of ourselves as desiring X. For example, when we are enraptured by an old melodrama and are moved to tears by the events on the screen, we do not do it immediately; we first identify ourselves with the image of a ‘naïve’ viewer moved to tears by this type of film. In this precise sense, our ideal-ego image is our symptom; it is the tool by means of which we organize our desire: *the subject desires by means of his or her ego-symptom*. What we have here is thus another example of the Hegelian rhetorical inversion in Lacan: we can identify with the other’s desire since our desire as such is already the desire of the other (in all its meanings: our desire is a desire to be desired by the

other, i.e. a desire for another's desire; what we experience as our innermost desire is structured by the decentred Other; etc). In order to desire, the subject has to identify with the desire of the other.

7. The ultimate proof of how this reflectivity of desire that constitutes 'self-consciousness' not only has nothing whatsoever to do with the subject's self-transparency but is its very opposite; i.e., involves the subject's radical splitting, which is provided by the paradoxes of love-hate. The Hollywood publicity-machinery used to describe Erich von Stroheim who, in the thirties and forties, regularly played sadistic German officers, as 'a man you'll love to hate'; to 'love to hate' somebody means that this person fits perfectly the scapegoat role of attracting our hatred. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the *femme fatale* in the *noir* universe is clearly a woman one 'hates to love': we know she means evil; it is against our will that we are forced to love her, and we hate ourselves and her for it. This hate-love clearly registers a certain radical split within ourselves, the split between the side of us that cannot resist love and the side which finds this love abominable. On the other hand, tautological cases of this reflectivity of love-hate are no less paradoxical. When, for example, I say to somebody that I 'hate to hate you', this again points towards a splitting: I really love you, but for certain reasons I am forced to hate you, and I hate myself for it. Even the positive tautology 'love to love' conceals its opposite: when I use it, it must usually be read as 'I (would) love to love you . . . (but I cannot any more)'; i.e., as expressing a willingness to go on, although the thing is already over. In short, when a husband or a wife tells his or her conjugal partner 'I love to love you', one can be sure that divorce is round the corner.

8. As to this logic of the 'non-all', see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do* (London: Verso 1991), especially Chapter 3.

9. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), the hitherto most radical attempt to demonstrate how every 'presupposed' support of sexual difference (in biology, in symbolic order, etc.) is ultimately a contingent, retroactive performative effect; that is, it is already 'posited'. One is tempted to summarize its result in the ironic conclusion that women are men masked as women, and men are women who escape into manhood to conceal their own femininity. As long as Butler unfolds the impasses of the standard ways to substantiate sexual difference, one can only admire her ingenuity; problems arise in the last, 'programmatic' part of the book, which unfolds a positive project of an unbounded performative game of constructing multiple subject-positions which subvert every fixed identity. What is lost thereby is the dimension designated by the very title of the book – gender *trouble*: the fact that sexuality is defined by a constitutive 'trouble', a traumatic deadlock, and that every performative formation is nothing but an endeavour to patch up this trauma. What one has to accomplish here is therefore a simple self-reflexive reversal of the negative into the positive: there is always trouble with gender. Why? *Because gender as such is a response to a fundamental 'trouble'*: 'normal' sexual difference constitutes itself in an attempt to avoid an impasse.

10. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XX: Encore* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975) p. 85. Consequently, Lacan's statement that 'there is no sexual relationship' does not contain a hidden normativity, an implicit norm of 'mature' heterosexuality impossible to attain – in the eyes of which the subject is always, by definition, guilty. Quite the contrary, Lacan's point is that in the domain of sexuality, *it is not possible to formulate any norm that should guide us with a legitimate claim to universal validity*. Every attempt to formulate such a norm is a secondary endeavour to mend an 'original' impasse. In other words, Lacan does not fall into the trap of invoking a cruel superego agency that 'knows' the subject is not able to meet its demands (thereby branding the subject's very being with a constitutive guilt). The relationship of the Lacanian subject to the symbolic Law is *not* a relationship to an agency whose demand the subject can never fully satisfy. Such a relationship to the Other of the Law, usually associated with the God of the Old Testament or with the Jansenist *Dieu obscur*, implies that the Other *knows* what it wants from us and that it is only we who cannot discern the Other's inscrutable will. With Lacan, however, *the Other of the Law itself does not know what it wants*.

11. For a detailed reading of the Hegelian logic of reflection, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Books 1989) Chapter 6.

12. Therein consists the crucial weakness of Robert Pippin's *Hegel's Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), a book that otherwise announces a new epoch in Hegelian studies. Its fundamental intention is not only to reaffirm the continued relevance of Hegel's dialectical logic, against the prevalent 'historicist' approach (which dismisses Hegel's 'metaphysics' –

read: dialectical logic – as a hopelessly outdated mastodon, and argues instead that the only thing ‘still alive’ in Hegel is to be found in the concrete socio-historical analyses of the *Phenomenology*, *Philosophy of Right*, *Aesthetics*, etc.), but demonstrates, also, how the only way to grasp this relevance leads back through to Kant. For even though Hegel’s position in no way entails a regression to the ‘precritical’ metaphysical ontology of the Absolute, it remains thoroughly confined to the Kantian criticism: Hegel’s speculative idealism is Kantian criticism brought to a close. In this sense, Pippin’s project deserves full support. And yet, Pippin fails at the crucial place: in his treatment of the logic of reflection. The final result of his analysis is that we are ultimately condemned to the antinomy of positing and external reflection, and, as a result, he repudiates ‘determining reflection’ as an empty metaphoric formula, a failed attempt to break out of this antinomy.

13. *Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989) p. 441. Since our concern here is limited to the paradoxical structure of the notion of contradiction, we leave aside the difference between difference and opposition, i.e. the mediating role of opposition between difference and contradiction.

14. Hegel’s choice of example – father, the symbolic function *par excellence* – is, of course, no way accidental or neutral. It was already Thomas Aquinas who evoked paternity when arguing that in order to survive, we must accept another’s word for things we ourselves do not witness: ‘if man refused to believe anything unless he knew it himself, then it would be quite impossible to live in this world. How could a person live, if he did not believe someone? How could he even accept the fact that a certain man is his father?’ (*The Pocket Thomas* [New York: Washington Square Press, 1960] p. 286). This, in contrast to maternity (as pointed out by Freud in his *Moses and Monotheism*), establishes paternity, from the very outset, as a matter of belief, i.e. a symbolic fact. As such, the Name-of-the-Father exerts its authority only against the background of trusting the Other’s word.

15. And what about the fourth term of the Lacanian algebra, *a*? The *object small a* designates precisely the endeavour to procure for the subject a positive support of his being beyond the signifying representation: by way of the fantasy-relation to *a*, the subject (*S*) acquires an imaginary sense of his ‘fullness of being’, of what he ‘truly is’ independently of what he is for others, i.e. notwithstanding his place in the intersubjective symbolic network.

16. *Marx’s Grundrisse*, selected and edited by David McLellan (London: Macmillan, 1980) p. 99.

17. Was Chaplin aware of the irony of the fact that Austria, Hitler’s first victim, was from 1934 (i.e., from Dolfuss’s right-wing coup) a proto-Fascist corporatist state? And does not the same hold for *The Sound of Music* in which the force opposed to Fascism assumes the form of self-sufficient Austrian provincialism, i.e. in which the politico-ideological struggle between Fascism and democracy is ultimately reduced to the struggle between two Fascisms, the one overtly barbarian and the one which still maintains a ‘human face’?

18. So whatever ex-Communists do, they are lost: if they behave aggressively, they display their true nature; if they behave properly and follow democratic rules, they are even more dangerous since they conceal their true nature.

19. The science-fiction film *Hidden* provides, in its very naivety, one of the most poignant *mises-en-scène* of such a materialization of a notional relationship: everyday life goes on in today’s California, until the main character puts on special green glasses and sees the true state of things – the ideological injunctions, invisible to the ordinary, conscious gaze, i.e. the inscriptions ‘do this, buy that . . .’ which bombard the subject from all around. The fantasy of the film thus provides us with glasses which literally enable us to ‘see ideology’ qua voluntary servitude, to perceive the hidden injunctions we follow when we experience ourselves as free individuals. The ‘error’ of the film, of course, is to hypothesize the ordinary material existence of ideological injunctions: their status is actually that of pure symbolic relations – it is only their effects which have material existence. (In other words, *Hidden* realizes in a slightly modified form the classical Enlightenment fantasy of ideology as the plot of the clerical caste which, in the interests of those in power, consciously deceives people.)

20. See J.N. Findlay, *Kant and the Transcendental Object* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1981) pp. 261–7.

21. What we must bear in mind here is that Kant is compelled to hypothesize the existence of ether by the fundamental fantasmatic frame of his philosophy, namely the logic of ‘real

opposition'; ether is thus deduced as the necessary positive opposite of the 'ordinary' ponderable-compressible-cohesible-exhaustible stuff.

22. See Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital* (London: New Left Books, 1970) pp. 186–9.

23. This point was first made by Beatrice Longuenesse in her excellent *Hegel et la critique de la métaphysique* (Paris: Vrin, 1981).

24. See Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza?* (Paris: Maspero, 1975).

25. Karl Marx, 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 11 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979) p. 103.

26. In his reference to the Hegelian 'Beautiful Soul', Lacan makes a deeply significant mistake by condensing two different 'figures of consciousness'. He speaks of the *Beautiful Soul* who, in the name of her *Law of the Heart*, rebels against the injustices of the world (see, for example, *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by A. Sheridan [London: Tavistock, 1977] p. 80). With Hegel, however, the 'Beautiful Soul' and the 'Law of the Heart' are two quite distinct figures: the first designates the hysterical attitude of deploring the wicked ways of the world while actively participating in their reproduction (Lacan is quite justified to apply it to Dora, Freud's exemplary case of hysteria). The 'Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit', on the other hand, clearly refer to a psychotic attitude, i.e., to a self-proclaimed Saviour who imagines his inner Law to be the Law of everybody and is therefore compelled, in order to explain why the 'world' (his social environs) is not following his precepts, to resort to paranoid constructions – to some plot of dark forces (like the Enlightened rebel who blames the reactionary clergy's propagating of superstitions for the failure of his efforts to win the support of the people). Lacan's slip is all the more mysterious for the fact that this difference between the Beautiful Soul and the Law of the Heart can be formulated perfectly by means of the categories elaborated by Lacan himself: the hysterical Beautiful Soul clearly locates itself within the big Other, it functions as a demand to the Other within an intersubjective field; whereas the psychotic, clinging to the Law of one's Heart, involves precisely a rejection, a suspension, of what Hegel referred to as the 'spiritual substance'.

27. See I. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965) A, 584–603.

28. Existence in the sense of empirical reality is thus the very opposite of the Lacanian Real: precisely in so far as God does not 'exist' qua part of experiential, empirical reality, He belongs to the Real.

29. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XX: Encore* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975) p. 32.

30. This point was articulated in all its philosophical weight by Georg Lukács in his *History and Class Consciousness* (London: NLB 1969).

31. That Kant himself already had a premonition of this link between existence and self-relating is attested to by the fact that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* he conferred on dynamical synthesis (which concerns also existence, not only predicates) regulative character.

32. The role of fantasy in perversion and in neurosis offers an exemplary case of this passage of in-itself into for-itself at work in the psychoanalytic clinic. A pervert immediately 'lives' his/her fantasy, stages it, which is why he or she does not entertain towards it a 'reflected' relationship. S/he does not relate towards it qua fantasy. In Hegelian terms: fantasy is not 'posited' as such, it is simply his or her in-itself. The fantasy of a hysteric, on the other hand, is also a perverse fantasy, but the difference consists not only in the fact that a hysteric relates to it in a reflected, 'mediated', way – *vulgari eloquentia* – but that he or she 'only fantasizes about what a pervert is actually doing'. The crucial point is that, within the hysterical economy, fantasy acquires a different function, becomes part of a delicate intersubjective game; by means of fantasy, a hysteric conceals his or her anxiety, while at the same time offering it as a lure to the other for whom the hysterical theatre is staged.

33. This exchangeability could be further exemplified by the ambiguity as to the precise causal status of trauma in psychoanalytic theory: on the one hand, one is fully justified in isolating the 'original trauma' as the ultimate ground which triggered the chain-reaction the final result of which is the pathological formation (the symptom); on the other hand, in order for event X to function as 'traumatic' in the first place, the subject's symbolic universe has had (already) to have been structured in a certain way.

34. See Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', in *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

35. In this precise sense Lacan conceives Master-Signifier as an 'empty' signifier, a signifier

without signified: an empty container which rearranges the previously given content. The signifier 'Jew' does not add any new signified – all its positive signified content is derived from the previously given elements which have nothing whatsoever to do with Jews as such. It just 'converts' them into an expression of Jewishness qua ground. One of the consequences to be drawn from it is that, in endeavouring to provide an answer to the question 'Why precisely were Jews picked out to play the scapegoat-role in anti-Semitic ideology?', we might easily succumb to the very trap of anti-Semitism, looking for some mysterious feature in them that, as it were, predestined them for that role: the fact that Jews were chosen for the role of the 'Jew' ultimately is contingent. As is pointed out by the well-known anti-anti-Semitic joke: 'Jews and cyclists are responsible for all our troubles. Why cyclists? WHY JEWS?'

36. Findlay, *Kant and the Transcendental Object*, p. 187.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

38. Here we must be attentive to how a simple symmetrical inversion brings about an asymmetrical, irreversible, non-specular result. That is to say, when the statement 'the Jew is exploitative, intriguing, dirty, lascivious . . .' is reversed into 'he is exploitative, intriguing, dirty, lascivious . . . because he is Jewish', we do not state the same content in another way. Something new is produced thereby, the *objet petit a*, that which is 'in Jew more than the Jew himself' and on account of which the Jew is what he phenomenally is. This is what the Hegelian 'return of the thing to itself in its conditions' amounts to: the thing returns to itself when we recognize in its conditions (properties) the effects of a transcendent Ground.

39. As to this exception, see Monique David-Menard, *La folie dans la raison pure* (Paris: Vrin, 1991) pp. 154–5.

40. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B, 199.

41. *Ibid.*, B, 223.

42. This irreducible antagonism of being and becoming thus also provides the matrix for Hegel's solution of the Kantian enigma of the Thing-in-itself: *the Thing-in-itself is in the modality of 'being' what the subject is in the modality of 'becoming'*.

43. Hegel's *Science of Logic*, p. 545. What we encounter in the tetrad *actuality – possibility – contingency – necessity* is thus the repetition, on a higher, more concrete, level, of the initial tetrad of *being – nothing – becoming – determinate being*: contingency is the 'passing' of possibility into actuality, whereas necessity designates their stable unity.

44. See Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, Chapter 5; and also Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom* (New York: Routledge, 1992) Chapter III.

45. This Kierkegaardian opposition of 'becoming' and 'being' perhaps lurks in the background of Heidegger's recurrent figure apropos of the ontological difference, namely the tautological verbalization of the substantive: 'worlding of the world', etc. 'Worlding of the world' designates precisely 'world in its becoming', in its possibility, which is not to be conceived as a deficient mode of actuality: ontological difference is the difference between (ontic) actuality and its (ontological) possibility, i.e. that surplus of possibility which gets lost the moment possibility actualizes itself. On another level, the 'ordering of the [political] order' could be said to designate the 'open' process of the formation of a new order, the 'unrest of becoming' (epitomized, in the case of Rumania, by the hole in the centre of the flag, previously occupied by the red star, the Communist symbol) which disappears, becomes invisible, the moment a new order is established via the emergence of a new Master-Signifier.

46. This undecidability also pertains to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford: OUP, 1977): one has only to bear in mind that its close, absolute knowledge, coincides with the starting point of *Logic*, the point without presuppositions, the point of absolute *non-knowledge* in which all one is capable of expressing is the empty being, the form of nothingness. The path of *Phenomenology* thus appears as what it is: a *process of forgetting*, i.e. the very opposite of the gradual, progressive 'remembering' of the Spirit's entire history. *Phenomenology* functions as the 'introduction' to the 'system' proper in so far as, and by way of it, the subject has to learn to obliterate the false fullness of the non-notional (representational) content – all non-reflected presuppositions – in order to be able, finally, to begin from (being which is) nothing. It is against this background that one has to conceive the re-emergence of the term 'skull' on the last page of *Phenomenology*, where Hegel designates its itinerary as 'the Calvary of absolute Spirit', (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 493). For the literal meaning of the German term for Calvary, *Schaedelstaette*, is 'the site of skulls'. The infinite judgement 'spirit is a bone (a skull)' acquires thereby a somewhat unexpected dimension: what is

revealed to the Spirit in the backwards-gaze of its *Er-Innerung*, inwardizing memory, are the scattered skulls of the past 'figures of consciousness'. The worn-out Hegelian formula according to which the Result, in its abstraction from the path leading to it, is a corpse, has to be inverted once again: this 'path' itself is punctuated by scattered skulls.

47. Is not the computer-generated *virtual reality* an exemplary case of reality conceived through the detour of its virtualization, i.e. of a reality wholly generated from its conditions of possibility?

48. Suffice it to recall here Kant's reflections on the meaning of the French Revolution: the very belief in the *possibility* of a free rational social order, attested to by the enthusiastic response of the enlightened public to the French Revolution, witnesses to the *actuality* of freedom, of a tendency towards freedom as an anthropological fact. See I. Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) p. 153.

49. This, of course, is a leftist reading of the Kennedy murder conspiracy theory; the reverse of it is that the trauma of Kennedy's death expresses a conservative longing for an authority which is not an imposture; or, to quote one of the commentaries on the anniversary of the Vietnam War: 'Somewhere within the generation now taking power, Vietnam may have installed the suspicion that leadership and authority are a fraud. That view may have subtle stunting effects upon moral growth. If sons don't learn to become fathers, a nation may breed politicians who behave less like full-grown leaders than like inadequate siblings, stepbrothers with problems of their own.' Against this background, it is easy to discern in the Kennedy myth the belief that he was the last 'full-grown leader', the last figure of authority which was not a fraud.

50. Another exemplary case of this paradoxical nature of the relationship between possible and actual is Senator Edward Kennedy's candidacy for presidential nomination in 1980: as long as his candidacy was still in the air, all polls showed him easily winning over any Democratic rival; yet the moment he publicly announced his decision to run for the nomination, his popularity plummeted.

51. What this notion of feminine castration ultimately amounts to is a variation on the notorious old Greek sophism, 'What you don't have, you have lost; you don't have horns, so you have lost them.' To avoid the conclusion that this sophism could be dismissed as inconsequential false reasoning – that is, to get a presentiment of the existential anxiety that may pertain to its logic – suffice it to recall the Wolf-Man, Freud's Russian analysand, who was suffering from a hypochondriacal *idée fixe*. He complained that he was the victim of a nasal injury caused by electrolysis; however, when the thorough dermatological examinations established that absolutely nothing was wrong with his nose, this triggered an unbearable anxiety in him: 'Having been told that nothing could be done for his nose because nothing was wrong with it, he felt unable to go on living in what he considered his irreparably mutilated state' (Muriel Gardiner, *The Wolf-Man and Sigmund Freud* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973] p. 287). The logic is here exactly the same as that of the old Greek sophism: if you do not have horns, you lost them; if nothing can be done, then the loss is irreparable. Within the Lacanian perspective, of course, this sophism points towards the fundamental feature of a structural/differential order: the unbearable absolute lack emerges at the very point when the lack itself is lacking.

52. As to this potentiality that pertains to the very actuality of power, see Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, Chapter 5.